

Message Text

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44
ACTION AF-18

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FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8621
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, SF
SUBJ: PRESS CONTROLS FORESHADOWED AT TRANSVAAL
NATIONAL PARTY CONGRESS

REF: PRETORIA 3160 AND 3174

1. PRIME MINISTER VORSTER AND OTHER HIGH GOVERNMENT
OFFICIALS HAVE PUT SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS GROUPS ON
NOTICE THAT SOME LIMITATION ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS
COULD BE IN OFFING, PROBABLY DURING 1974 PARLIAMENTARY
SESSION.

2. VORSTER GAVE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS CHIEFS UNTIL
JANUARY 1974 TO "PUT THEIR HOUSE IN ORDER." IF THEY
FAILED DO SO, HE SAID THAT, "AS CERTAIN AS I AM STANDING
HERE", HE WOULD TAKE ACTION AGAINST THEM. VORSTER
SAID SECTIONS OF PRESS, WHICH HE DID NOT IDENTIFY,
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CONTINUED TO INDULGE IN CHARACTER ASSASSINATION, HALF-

TRUTHS, AND UNTRUTHS AIMED AT UNDERMINING WHITE MAN AND, IN PARTICULAR, THE AFRIKANER NATIONALIST. HE SAID HE HAD WARNED PRESS MANY TIMES, BOTH IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, TO MEND ITS WAYS. BUT, ACCORDING TO VORSTER, SECTIONS OF PRESS WERE SEEKING CONFRONTATION WITH SAG. HE SAID HE HAD NO QUARREL WITH CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT, AS SUCH. IN FACT, MORE THE OPPPOSITION PRESS CRITICIZED SAG THE STRONGER ITS POLITICAL POSITION SEEMED TO BECOME. WHAT HE OBJECTED TO WAS INCITEMENT OF BLACK AGAINST WHITE AND ATTACKS ON FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE CITED READER'S LETTER WHICH APPEARED IN RAND DAILY MAIL SEPTEMBER 4. LETTER SAID APARTHEID ROBBED BLACKS OF THEIR LAND AND PRODUCE AND FORCED THEM TO LIVE IN MISERY, POVERTY AND DESPAIR. THIS KIND OF THING, ACCORDING TO VORSTER, COULD ONLY MISLEAD AFRICANS AND POISON RACIAL ATMOSPHERE. HOWEVER, HE DID NOT GO BEYOND THIS IN TELLING PRESS CHIEFS HOW THEY ARE EXPECTED TO PUT HOUSE IN ORDER OR WHAT SAG WOULD DO IF PRESS FAILED TO SATISFY HIS REQUIREMENTS. VORSTER DID NOT MENTION RIOTOUS ASSEMBLIES ACT BYTCAME. (AMENDMENT OF THIS ACT HAS BEEN ONE OF THE WAYS SUGGESTED TO CURB PRESS.)

3. MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR DR. CONNIE MULDER HAS BEEN MORE FORTHCOMING IN DISCUSSING SOME OF THE THINGS SAG COULD DO TO CURB PRESS. SPEAKING TO DELEGATES AT TRANSVAAL NATIONAL CONGRESS HE "WONDERED" (A) WHETHER THERE SHOULD NOT BE REGISTER FOR REPORTERS, CORRESPONDENTS AND KEY NEWSMEN SETTING DOWN MINIMUM STANDARDS OF QUALIFICATIONS; (B) WHETHER KEY NEWSMEN AND POLITICAL CORRESPONDENTS, INCLUDING SENIOR EDITORIAL STAFF, SHOULD NOT BE REQUIRED TO BE FULLY BILINGUAL AND SOUTH AFRICAN CITIZENS; AND (C) WHETHER WRITERS OF NEWS STORIES SHOULD NOT BE IDENTIFIED. MULDER STRESSED THAT NONE OF HIS SUGGESTIONS WAS DESIGNED TO INHIBIT PRESS FREEDOM AND THAT HE WOULD DEFEND RIGHT OF RESPONSIBLE NEWSPAPERS TO CRITICIZE GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, THOSE NEWSPAPERS WHICH DAMAGED SOUTH AFRICA'S NAME AND IMAGE AND ACTED IN AN UNPatriOTIC MANNER WERE TAKING CONCEPT OF PRESS FREEDOM TOO FAR, HE SAID, AND SHOULD NOT COUNT ON GOVERNMENT'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONTINUED ACQUIESCENCE. MULDER GAVE THREE EXAMPLES OF WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS VIOLATIONS OF PRESS FREEDOM. FIRST WAS TREATMENT OF PRESS CONFERENCE HE HELD IN SALISBURY LAST WEEK (PRETORIA 3174). HE HAD USED WORD "TERRORISTS" THROUGHOUT BUT WAS REPORTED IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PRESS AS HAVING SAID "GUERRILLAS". SECOND WAS SUNDAY TIMES REPORT WHICH TOLD HOW YOUNG WHITE BOY HAD DIED BECAUSE BLACK AMBULANCE REFUSED TO CARRY HIM TO HOSPITAL. THIS

STORY WAS COMPLETELY UNTRUE. THIRD WAS SEPTEMBER 11 RAND DAILY MAIL EDITORIAL WHICH CLAIMED HE HAD INSULTED BLACK LEADERS IN PREVIOUS REMARKS TO CONGRESS. MULDER DESCRIBED THIS AS DELIBERATE BEDEVILMENT OF RACE RELATIONS, AS WELL AS MISUSE OF PRESS FREEDOM. MOREOVER, MULDER THOUGHT THERE WAS TOO MUCH "OVER-SENSATIONALIZED" PUBLICITY GIVEN TO UTTERANCES OF BLACK LEADERS. PRESS AND LEADERS BOTH SHOULD BEWARE OF LOOSE TALK, HE SAID.

4. MARAIS STEYN, THE YEOVILLE MP WHO HAS JUST DEFECTED TO NP FROM THE OPPOSITION (PRETORIA 3160), MADE HIS PUBLIC DEBUT AS NATIONALIST AT THE TRANSVAAL CONGRESS WITH AN ATTACK ON WHITE NEWSPAPERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHICH PUBLISH SPECIAL EDITIONS FOR AFRICANS AND COLOREDS. STEYN SAID NEWSPAPERS OFTEN TOLD WHITES ONE THING AND BLACKS ANOTHER THROUGH MEDIUM OF THESE SPECIAL EDITIONS. (NEWSPAPERS PUBLISHING SPECIAL EDITIONS INCLUDE CAPE TOWN'S DIE BURGER, THE AFRIKAANS SUNDAY NEWSPAPER RAPPORT, THE SUNDAY TIMES AND RAND DAILY MAIL.) MULDER PROMISED THAT HIS DEPARTMENT WOULD LOOK INTO QUESTION OF SEPARATE EDITIONS.

5. COMMENT: SAG AND NATIONAL PARTY HAVE OFTEN THUNDERED ABOUT ALLEGED PRESS ABUSES BUT, IN PAST, HAVE DRAWN BACK BEFORE INFlicting IRREPARABLE DAMAGE ON FREEDOM OF PRESS. VORSTER'S ULTIMATUM THAT PRESS PUT ITS HOUSE IN ORDER BY JANUARY 1974 WOULD APPEAR TO OFFER ANOTHER FACE-SAVING WAY OUT FOR ALL PARTIES, IF SAG ALLOWS. HEADS OF PRESS GROUPS UNDOUBTEDLY WILL MAKE EARNEST ATTEMPT BETWEEN NOW AND JANUARY TO MEET WITH VORSTER TO TRY TO ALLAY SUSPICIONS. NOR SHOULD IT BE ASSUMED THAT ENGLISH PRESS IS ALONE IN TRYING TO STAVE OFF CONTROLS.

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AFRIKAANS NEWSPAPERS HAVE SAME INTEREST IN FREEDOM OF PRESS AND SOME HAVE ALREADY COME OUT IN OPEN AGAINST CONTROLS. HOWEVER, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT FIERCELY INDEPENDENT SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PRESS WILL VOLUNTARILY SUBMIT ITSELF TO KIND OF SELF-CENSORSHIP THAT WOULD SATISFY NATIONALISTS. NOR, HAVING WHIPPED UP POPULAR FEELINGS IN NATIONALIST RANK AND FILE CAN SAG EASILY DROP MATTER. THERE IS POSSIBILITY THEREFORE, THAT SOME FORM OF PRESS CONTROL WILL EMERGE AT 1974 PARLIAMENTARY SESSION.

SMITH

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